


THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



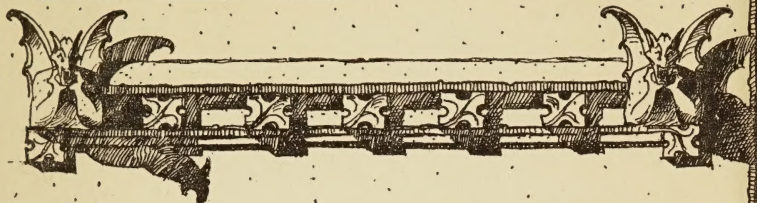
3 0620 00686308 7





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2021 with funding from  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art





CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION

EAUX-FORTES

sur

PARIS

par

C. MERYOR.



FREDERICK KEPPEL & CO.



1905

NO 4 EAST 39<sup>TH</sup> STREET - NEW YORK





CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION

EAUX-FORTES

SUR

PARIS

par

C. MERYON.



FREDERICK KEPPEL & CO.



1905

NO 4 EAST 39<sup>TH</sup> STREET - NEW YORK



## INTRODUCTION

**C**HARLES MERYON was born in Paris on the 23d of November, 1821. He was the natural son of Charles Lewis Meryon, a London physician, and Narcisse Chaspoux, a ballet-dancer at the Opéra. Deserted by his father, Meryon was brought up by his mother, from whom he inherited his artistic nature. In 1837 he entered the French navy, but left it in 1846 and established himself in Paris for the study of art. To give the reader an idea of the art, character, and life of Meryon (perhaps the most tragical story in the history of modern art), one can scarcely do better than to quote from Mr. Frederick Wedmore and Monsieur Philippe Burty, both of whom have written of Meryon with wonderful comprehension and sympathy. From Mr. Wedmore's book, *Meryon and Meryon's Paris*, we quote the following:

“Fancy him, then, established in a lonely way, and yet, of course, with some artistic comrades within reach, in the cabin-like rooms of the humblest floor of the street, the north side of which is occupied by the church that gives that street its name, St. Etienne du Mont, and which Meryon made the subject of one of the most harmonious and mysterious of his works. . . . The quarter, in any journey from reputable parts of Paris, would be reached by passage from richer street to poorer, and so to poorer again. A lost quarter, even behind and beyond the shabbiest of the quarters of stu-



dents; around it, in strange lanes, the dwellings of the *chiffonniers*, the rag-gatherers, who with basket on back cluster towards it at midnight from nightly search among offal and gutter, and wander out from it once more when evening has come again, to spread themselves over the town. Beyond it an undiscovered country, known only to the police and the workers in strange trades plied in remote places. There Meryon lived.

“That old-world quarter of Paris — a lost quarter, a quarter seemingly deserted, yet thickly peopled all the while — was favorable to Meryon’s art, to the growth of his imagination, to the strength and endurance of the impression which the mysterious and crowded city made on him in these the first years of his living there in manhood. He began his study of Paris, observing consciously quaint combinations of window and house-roof, the chimneys, the *tourelles* in quiet back streets, narrow blind lanes where the Middle Age lingered, and perhaps not less consciously taking note of that moral aspect of Paris which was to color his work and to bring into strange and new juxtaposition elements of beauty and horror, the fascination of whose union he was almost the first to appreciate. A high literary genius, Victor Hugo, had blended beauty and horror in his great romance, *Notre Dame de Paris*, which Paris had inspired. But in pictorial art Meryon was to be alone, and the Paris that he pictured was pictured in a way only too much his own — only too much above and beyond the valuing of those to whom he first submitted his work.”

As to Meryon’s technical methods, we quote the following from Monsieur Philippe Burty :

“His plan of working was this. He seldom made a complete drawing on the spot. He fixed on his subject, and then he went patiently every day at the same hour, and drew on small pieces of paper studies of the various portions, rigorously exact in their details. These he either stuck together when



he returned home, or else made a drawing from them. . . . He used a very hard, fine-pointed pencil. He held this pencil as one holds a burin, and he worked with it in light and incisive strokes from the bottom upwards."

\* \* \* \* \*

The present exhibition does not aim to present a complete collection of Meryon's work, nor even a complete series of *Eaux-fortes sur Paris*, the minor pieces of that *suite* having been omitted. It is simply designed to show — as completely as the extreme rarity of fine examples will permit — the variety of effect of which his greatest plates are capable under different conditions of paper and inking. From Monsieur Gustave Bourcard's book we take the following note about the famous *papier verdâtre* :

"Meryon used for his *tirages* many different kinds of paper, but he was particularly fond of a greenish paper made during the time of the Directoire and at the commencement of the First Empire. . . . We think, however, that the impressions on Japan paper, or on fine Holland, are often superior. There are, for the matter of that, no general rules to be cited. It must be the actual impression in question, and careful comparison with others, which alone can decide on the beauty or the superiority of the print."

We particularly desire to call attention to several impressions, in the present exhibition, on a curious gray India paper. Its appearance would hardly lead one to believe that it would yield a good proof; but in every case it seems to give a softness of contour, a depth and transparency of shadow, and a feeling of atmosphere which are quite remarkable. The impressions on warm yellow Japanese paper were, as a rule, earlier than those on the famous *papier verdâtre*.

They almost always give a charming effect of sunshine.

\* \* \* \*

To return to the life of Meryon, we give two extracts from the book of Monsieur Philippe Burty to illustrate the lighter and the darker sides of his character. In speaking to Monsieur Burty (probably several years before the date given in the second extract), Meryon said:

“At certain dates every work of art that is not, without a doubt, worthy of preservation, should be destroyed. Of the sculpture, mortar should be made by means of an enormous crusher. Of paintings they should make tarpaulins, such as the sailors cover packages with on board ship. The artists would be the first to lend themselves to such a scheme, for if they had, for instance, made a second-rate statue for the decoration of a monument, they would be enchanted to see it replaced by a better. The whole world would be the gainers by it, from the models who pose for the statues, or the custodians who watch over them in the museums, to the hewers of the stone and the draymen who transport it to the studio.’ ‘But,’ I answer, ‘have you ever reflected, my dear Meryon, as to who should compose the jury to carry out your schemes?’ Whereat he laughed so immoderately as to be heard in the street; for on the rare occasions when he laughed it was the laughter of a child.

“In the following month” (of the year 1858) “Meryon moved to the upper portion of Faubourg St. Jacques, to a little summer-house which belonged to the mother of M. Léon Gaucherel, the painter and engraver. Here, throughout the day, he tilled every portion of a small garden with feverish activity, not to plant and sow, but in search of imaginary bodies mysteriously buried there. His nights were terrible. This kind, inoffensive, generous man imagined his bed turned into a boat fighting against the tempest on an ocean whose waves were blood.”



“And so the artist” (to go back to Mr. Wedmore’s text), “sufficiently neglected indeed from without, came to carry within him his most implacable enemies. In his imagination, they lingered in wait behind the corners of the street—would be down upon him to distress and thwart him if he paused long or was heedless of who approached. And so with nervous and frightened eye, but with hand still keenly obedient and splendidly controlled, he stood on some empty space of quay, sketching, as his wont had been, with the finest of pencil points, the angles of house and church, bits of window, roof and chimney, to be afterwards pieced carefully together and used in the etching of the plate.

. . . . .

“The Pont au Change—both the large original etching and the exquisite interpretation of Nicolle’s old design—the Pont Neuf, the great Abside itself with its foreground of Seine stream, will show us that no one like Meryon has depicted running water, now shallow, now deep, never mirror-like, never gathered into waves, but rippling pleasantly along against the angles of the bridge piers, or flowing moody and sullen under its darkest arches; now in happy sunlight; now again in the profound and blackened shadow, suggestive of the suicidal plunge and the slime of the river-bed; now again in the half-lights, in the delicate semitones more beautiful and difficult.

. . . . .

“Although a single etching may show well enough both manual skill and a sense of beauty which shall be a surprise to the stranger, it is only by a knowledge of the whole, or, I would rather say, of many pieces assembled carefully, that the personal sentiment can be known and valued—that it can be felt how much more there is in the artist’s thought and work than the mere stones of the building he is recording, the mere water whose steady flow under dark bridges he has painted, so to say, as no one else; how he is possessed of a sense of the restless, eager, almost tragi-

cal activity of the existence around him; how the character, the life, the mysteries, the fortunes of Paris—the Paris unfrequented of the tourist and the prosperous—are depicted on his plates.

“Spirits spoke to him, only too well, in every street of Paris. The stones were alive. And in every building of beauty or age, at every dark street-corner, in every bridge that spanned the breadth of Seine, in every aspect of wandering water or passing sky, there was something to recall to him fortunes of the solitary, of the disappointed, of the desperate, of the poor. His sense of these strange fortunes—of their mystery and tragedy—he has woven inseparably into the fabric of his work.”

Meryon died at the Asylum of Charenton in 1868. “*Sa barque*,” as his old shipmate, Captain de Salicis said at his grave—“*sa barque, à tout instant noyée, courait sans repos au naufrage.*”

DAVID KEPPEL.

NOTE: In the preceding article we omit the acute accent (é) which the French always use in spelling Meryon's name. The fact is that Meryon himself never used this accent.



# CATALOGUE





## CATALOGUE

- 1 **Old Gate of the Palace of Justice.** (Wedmore No. 3.)  
Second State, on the gray India paper noted in the preface.
- 2 **The Same.** Another impression, on yellowish Holland paper.
- 3 **Arms of the City of Paris.** (Wedmore No. 5.)  
Trial proof before letters. Very rare.
- 4 **The Same.** Impression on warm yellow Japan paper. The signature, the date and Meryon's address have been added.
- 5 **The Same.** Impression of the same State as the preceding. In black ink on white Holland paper.
- 6 **Le Stryge.** (Wedmore No. 7.)  
The very rare First State — before the verses were erased — superb impression on *papier verdâtre*. This impression shows the *papier verdâtre* at its best, giving a gloomy and tragical effect.
- 7 **The Same.** Another impression of the First State, printed on yellow Japan paper, which gives a bright, sunny effect most unusual with this plate.
- 8 **The Same.** Second State, on very fine *vergé* paper, from the de Salicis collection. Although this impression is in the Second State, the marks of the erasure are still distinctly visible, and the words of the verse have been written, in pencil, by Meryon on the lower margin.
- 9 **The Same.** Second State, on gray India paper, very rich and liquid.
- 10 **The Same.** Another impression, in black ink on Holland paper.

"In the winter of 1861-62," says Monsieur Andrieu, "Madame Max Valrey introduced me to Meryon. Taking up the etching, which did not then bear the name of *Le Stryge*, Meryon said to me, 'You can't tell why my comrades, who know their work better than I do, fail with the Tower of St. Jacques? It is because the modern square is the principal thing for them and the Middle Age tower an accident. But if they saw, as I see, an enemy behind each battlement and arms through

each loophole; if they expected, as I do, to have the boiling oil and the molten lead poured down on them, they would do far finer things than I can do. For often I have to patch my plate so much that I ought indeed to be a tinker. My comrades,' added he,—striking the *Stryge*,—'my comrades are sensible fellows. They are never haunted by this monster.' 'What monster?' I asked, and seeing a reproachful look, I corrected myself 'Or rather, what does this monster mean?' 'The monster is mine and that of the men who built the Tower of St. Jacques. He means stupidity, cruelty, lust, hypocrisy—they have all met in that one beast.'"

Frederick Wedmore, *Meryon and Meryon's Paris*, p. 45.

- 11 **Le Petit Pont.** (Wedmore No. 8.)  
Very rich and sombre impression of the Second State, on *papier verdâtre*. The scratches in the lower margin have not yet been erased from the plate.
- 12 **The Same.** Impression on buff Japan paper. Strangely enough, this impression, although on very warm-toned paper, is almost as gloomy in effect as the preceding. It was shown in the exhibition made in London about thirty years ago, at the Dowdeswell gallery.
- 13 **The Same.** Impression in *bistre* ink on Whatman paper.
- 14 **L'Arche du Pont Notre Dame.** (Wedmore No. 9.)  
First State, on *papier verdâtre*. This impression has an extraordinary amount of what the Germans call *Stimmung*.
- 15 **The Same.** Superb impression on gray India paper.
- 16 **The Same.** Another impression, on white *vergé* paper.
- 17 **La Galerie de Notre Dame.** (Wedmore No. 10.)  
First State, on *papier verdâtre*.
- 18 **The Same.** Impression on gray India paper. An excellent example of the peculiar soft atmospheric qualities which this paper seems to yield.
- 19 **The Same.** Exceptionally brilliant impression in an almost black ink. White *vergé* paper.
- 20 **The Same.** Another impression on warm tinted Whatman paper.
- 21 **La Rue des Mauvais Garçons.** (Wedmore No. 11.)  
Second State, in *bistre* ink on *vergé* paper. This print also formed part of the Dowdeswell exhibition in London.

"The one lyric note of the *Rue des Mauvais Garçons*, for instance, is in its own way as complete a thing as is the magnificent epic of Abside or Morgue."

Frederick Wedmore, *Fine Prints*, p. 72.



*The verses at the top of the plate may be translated as follows :*

“What mortal inhabits this dismal abode? Who is it that lurks there in night and in darkness? Is it a virtuous one, poor and uncomplaining; or crime — would you say? Some vicious soul? Ah! truly, I don't know; if you wish to find out, inquisitive one, go seek. You still have time to do it.”

- 22 **La Tour de l'Horloge.** (Wedmore No. 12.)  
Very brilliant. First State, on *papier verdâtre*.  
The earliest impressions may be known by a straight dry-point stroke crossing the blank lower margin. For an impression on this paper the effect is unusually sunny.
- 23 **The Same.** Impression on warm Japan paper.
- 24 **The Same.** Another impression, on gray India paper.
- 25 **The Same.** Another impression, in almost black ink on *vergé* paper, unusually brilliant. This impression, like all the preceding ones, has the horizontal stroke in the lower margin, mentioned in the case of the first impression.
- 26 **The Same.** Impression in brown ink on warm *vergé* paper.
- 27 **Tourelle, Rue de la Tixeranderie.** (Wedmore No. 13.)  
Beautiful impression of the First State, on *papier verdâtre*.
- 28 **The Same.** On warm Japan paper.
- 29 **The Same.** Splendid impression on gray India paper.  
From the collections of Auguste Delâtre and Sir Seymour Haden.
- 30 **The Same.** On white *vergé* paper.
- 31 **St. Etienne-du-Mont.** (Wedmore No. 14.)  
First State. This, as in the case of No. 22 of the catalogue, is unusually bright and cheerful for an impression on *papier verdâtre*.
- 32 **The Same.** On warm Japan paper. This paper suits the plate admirably, as the chief effect of the St. Etienne is derived from the patches of bright sunlight falling on the stone walls.
- 33 **The Same.** Impression of the Second State on India paper, laid into plate paper. The head and arms of the workman on the lower side of the scaffolding on the right have been obliterated.

“The St. Etienne-du-Mont is one of those etchings which possess the abiding charm of perfect things. In it a subject entirely beautiful and dignified is treated with force and with refinement of spirit, and with faultless exactitude of hand. It shows — nothing can better show — the characteristic of Meryon, the union of the courage of realism and the sentiment of poetry.”

Frederick Wedmore, *Fine Prints*, p. 76.

- 34 **La Pompe Notre Dame.** (Wedmore No. 15.)  
Superb impression of the First State, on *papier verdâtre*. The title has been written in ink by Meryon.
- 35 **The Same.** On gray India paper.
- 36 **The Same.** In *bistre* ink on white *vergé* paper. This impression also formed part of the Dowdeswell exhibition in London.
- 37 **Le Pont Neuf.** (Wedmore No. 17.)  
First State, with the verses, on *papier verdâtre*. Very harmonious and beautiful impression, although much less brilliant than the succeeding one.
- 38 **The Same.** Second State. The verses have just been erased and the marks of their erasure are plainly visible. Possibly the most brilliant impression in existence. Printed on warm *vergé* paper.
- 39 **The Same.** Another impression in the Second State; also on *vergé* paper.
- 40 **Le Pont au Change.** (Wedmore No. 18.)  
First State. *Papier verdâtre*. From Sir Seymour Haden's collection. Impressions of this print on *papier verdâtre* are of the utmost rarity.
- 41 **The Same.** Impression of unusual brilliancy on fine white *vergé* paper.
- 42 **The Same.** In warm brown ink on *vergé* paper.
- 43 **La Morgue.** (Wedmore No. 20.)  
Impression of the Second State, on yellowish *vergé* paper.  
"This print, quite as renowned as the preceding, if not more so, is, in our opinion, the most precious piece of the entire series; the genius of the immortal artist here reveals itself in its immortal power, its inimitable magic."  
Gustave Bourcard, *A Travers Cinq Siècles de Gravures*, p. 505.
- 44 **L'Abside de Notre Dame de Paris.** (Wedmore No. 22.)  
Superb impression of the Second State, in *bistre* ink on old Whatman paper, from the Duke of Aremberg's collection.  
"The Abside is accounted the masterpiece of Meryon in right of its solemn and austere beauty."  
Frederick Wedmore, *Fine Prints*, p. 73.
- 45 **Le Pont-au-Change vers 1784.** Impression of a state between the First and Second states described by Wedmore; with the title, but before the words *tiré du cabinet de M. Destailleur, architecte*.
- 46 **Entrée du Couvent des Capucines Français à Athens.** (Wedmore No. 32.)  
The very rare First State, on *vergé* paper.

47 **The Same.** Second State; also on *vergé* paper. It was in 1839, while cruising in the Ægean Sea on the war-ship *Montabello*, that Meryon made a drawing of the choragic monument of Lysierates, from which he afterwards made this etching.

48 **San Francisco.** (Wedmore No. 80.)

## ORIGINAL DRAWINGS BY MERYON

49 **Drawing of the House to the Left in Meryon's Etching of St. Etienne du Mont.** From the collection of Sir Seymour Haden. At the bottom of this drawing Meryon has written in French a description, of which we give the following translation:

“Undulated tiles — less steep pitch, but only in the lower part — in the outside portion the stones are very unlike in size — plastered — at the bottom as far as the first story. Posters of different series, overlapping these, at the foot of the wall and the roof gutter, at the angle of pavement. February 2, 1851.”

50 **Sketch for the Etching *Le Tombeau de Molière*.**

51 **Another Sketch.** Probably also for *Le Tombeau de Molière*.

52 **Original Drawing for the Central Feature in Meryon's Plate of San Francisco.** From the collections of Philippe Burty and Sir Seymour Haden.

53 **Drawing for the Etching *Arche du Pont Notre Dame*.** From the Sir Seymour Haden collection. This drawing is taken from a point of view farther from the arch of the bridge than that which Meryon finally adopted for the etching.

54 **Manuscript by Meryon, Reviewing His Own Etchings.** To students of Meryon this article of his is intensely interesting, the more so as much has remained unknown to the commentators until now. It is in the form of an essay written as a sort of review of Philippe Burty's catalogue (the first published) of Meryon's etchings.



THE DE VINNE PRESS

